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General and complete disarmament: observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control

Report of the Secretary-General**

Addendum

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* A/57/150.
** The information contained herein was received after the submission of the main report.

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Replies received from Governments

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]
[9 July 2002]

1. With each passing year, mankind is becoming increasingly aware of the need to protect the environment and is attempting to limit, reduce and reverse the damage which it has caused and continues to cause. In a few weeks time, this issue will be taken up at the highest level at the World Summit on Social Development, which is due to take place in Johannesburg.

2. Military research and development activities are direct or potential sources of damage to the environment.

3. Cuba's strategy for economic and social development provides for the conservation and protection of the environment, in order to ensure its sustainability. The key principles of Cuba's environmental policy are the following:

- The right to a safe environment is a fundamental right of all citizens;
- Citizens have a duty to protect the environment;
- Environmental management is comprehensive and cross-cutting; State agencies and other entities and institutions, society and citizens in general participate in the process in a coordinated manner and in accordance with their respective competencies and capacities.

4. Cuba also has a set of national instruments for the control and management of environmental policy, including the Environmental Act and its complementary legislation, and the Decree Law on Biosecurity.

5. Cuba is a State party to 35 international treaties on the environment or closely related subjects.

6. Cuba considers that the continued existence of a large quantity of nuclear weapons poses a grave threat, not only to the survival of the human species but also to the environment.

7. There is growing concern at the lack of any real progress towards the complete elimination of these weapons. The Conference on Disarmament has still not been able to fulfil the express mandate entrusted to it by the international community and reiterated each year in resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, which call for negotiations on nuclear disarmament to begin immediately.

8. In contrast, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction provides a model of how to effect the complete prohibition of this type of weapon of mass destruction. In this connection, Cuba has continued to work towards the implementation of the Convention by strengthening the relevant national institutions and procedures.

9. Cuba has noted with great concern the interruption of the process of strengthening the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. The negotiations on the draft verification protocol to the Convention, which were held within the framework of the Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts, included, inter alia, proposals for protecting the environment in the implementation of the Convention.

10. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons can all cause irreparable harm to the environment. Cuba therefore believes that the complete elimination of these weapons still offers the best hope for avoiding the effects of their use or of accidental contamination.

11. Measures taken to destroy weapons should, where appropriate, take into account the provisions of international agreements on the environment.

12. States must adopt the administrative regulations or measures necessary to guarantee full implementation of the objectives set out in the resolution of the General Assembly on observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control.

13. Military conflicts result in destruction at every level and the environmental consequences are considerable. All efforts to prevent these conflicts, based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, should therefore be supported.

14. There is greater awareness today of the practices and measures needed to promote sustainable social and economic development, although not all countries are

equally well placed to act on that awareness. It is therefore necessary to consistently promote closer international cooperation in the peaceful use of scientific and technical advances, not only with the participation of the States and intergovernmental institutions concerned but also with the contribution of non-governmental organizations.

15. National laws and regulations that are impediments to such international cooperation must be eliminated. Cuba will continue to contribute, through its modest efforts, to observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control.

Panama

[Original: Spanish]
[24 June 2002]

The Republic of Panama is a party to numerous instruments that establish international regimes in the field of the environment. In this connection, Panama recognizes that the use of weapons, both conventional and in particular unconventional, can cause grave and irreversible damage to the environment that is needed for the sustainable development of our countries. It should be recalled that the Republic of Panama does not have an army as such nor does it have any surplus of weapons and explosives. Consequently, these international norms are being observed as part of the general obligations of Panama as a member of the international community and observance is not limited to the sphere of disarmament and arms control. However, the Republic of Panama attaches the utmost importance to finding a solution to the problem of contamination of some areas that were part of the former United States military bases in the country, and especially to the problem of the clean-up of the contamination caused by chemical weapons on the island of San José. Panama is of the view, furthermore, that observance of environmental norms must also be required in all cases where there is some degree of contamination resulting from the use of arms and explosives, even in the absence of any specific agreement on disarmament and/or arms control.

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Replies received from Governments

Iraq

[Original: Arabic]
[10 September 2002]

1. The United Nations has taken great pains to point out the dangers of nuclear weapons, their impact on the environment and human beings and the enormous threat they pose for humanity and civilization. General Assembly resolutions have stressed the need for full participation of all States through the adoption of measures to guarantee compliance with environmental standards in the performance of treaties and conventions. Compliance with environmental standards has also become a fundamental principle in the drafting and execution of international conventions on disarmament and arms limitation. It is now essential for the international community and its organizations to follow up this important question on the basis of the standards adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and in various conventions.

2. Yet despite the fact that such conventions and General Assembly resolutions call for the performance of the commitments undertaken by the States Members of the United Nations with regard to the preservation of the environment, we observe that two States permanent members of the Security Council, namely the United States and the United Kingdom, have intentionally violated, time and time again, their commitments under the relevant resolutions and conventions on disarmament and arms limitation. Indeed, in 1991 the United States and Britain used, for the first time, a new generation of radioactive weapons, i.e., depleted uranium missiles, in their aggression against Iraq. In 1999 they again made use of such weapons in their military operations against Yugoslavia, despite their awareness of the adverse impact of those weapons on human beings and the environment.

3. The American and British forces used more than 800 tons of depleted uranium munitions during their aggression against Iraq in January 1991. That aggressive activity had grave environmental and health consequences due to exposure to the radioactive metal, which brought the demise of thousands of victims, especially children, women and the elderly. Moreover, the disastrous consequences continue to affect subsequent generations.

4. It has been shown that high-concentration uranium missiles are made from radioactive nuclear waste left over from the manufacture of nuclear fuel and nuclear bombs. The impact of such a missile with its target, such as a tank, armoured vehicle or building, gives rise to chemical and radioactive dust that spreads out over broad areas, contaminating the air, the soil, plants and humans for hundreds of generations to come, inasmuch as the half-life of depleted uranium is 4.5 billion years. This shows the dimensions of the horrific tragedy inflicted by the use of those weapons of mass destruction on human beings and the environment in Iraq. Exposure of human beings to radiation from depleted uranium affects the kidneys, the liver and the immunological and reproductive systems in addition to causing birth deformities and cancer of various types. Among the consequences of the widespread random use of this type of weapon of destruction is a sizeable rise in the incidence of different kinds of cancer, in particular leukaemia, precisely in the southern governorates of Iraq which were the theatre of the operations involving the use of this horrible weapon.

5. The study entitled "The health hazards of depleted uranium munitions", carried out by the British Royal Society, part I of which appeared in May 2001 and part II, in March, 2002, revealed that depleted uranium contaminates drinking water sources and the soil, exposing the civilian population in areas where it is used to risks. It can cause renal disease if large quantities of dust or water contaminated with it are inhaled or swallowed. German Professor Siegwart-Horst Günther states that at least half a million people in the area suffer from diseases caused by the depleted uranium missiles employed by America during the 1991 Gulf War. He adds that the region subjected to bombing was a desert area and that, because the particles remain in the air, they are carried by the wind to other areas. Otherwise they remain in the ground and are transported by rain to the groundwater as well as to vegetation. He pointed out that the Americans were aware of the studies he has conducted on such missiles and know that they bring about the total collapse of the immune system, especially in children, skin ulceration, fever resembling the foot-and-mouth disease that affects animals and cancer, especially of the blood. It also causes liver and kidney failure, leukaemia and

other forms of cancer, including bone and bone-marrow cancer, and genetic deformities.

In a statement made in Geneva on 27 March 2002, Mr. Pekka Haavisto, Chairman of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Depleted Uranium Assessment Team created to ascertain the effects of the use of depleted uranium missiles by the American forces in Kosovo in 1999, said that the team had found "widespread but low-level (uranium) contamination" in Serbia and Montenegro. He added that his team had been surprised to find depleted uranium in air samples more than two years after the end of the struggle in Kosovo. What was more disquieting, he said, was the danger that any disturbance of the soil was liable to cause particles of uranium to fly up into the air. The greatest concern, however, related to the future penetration of particles of depleted uranium into the groundwater.

This testimony from the United Nations regarding a region in which depleted uranium was used in quantities far lower than those used against Iraq confirms that the scope of the disaster in Iraq is several times greater than that suffered by Yugoslavia.

6. We therefore consider it essential for the international community, represented by its official bodies concerned with disarmament, to make genuine efforts towards the conclusion of an international convention banning the use of depleted uranium munitions and to strive to strengthen the international conventions in force on the preservation of the environment through the creation of additional procedures and working mechanisms to compel States parties to abide by them and to respect environmental principles.